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# Marlborough

and other poems

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# Marlborough

and other poems

by

CHARLES HAMILTON SORLEY

LATE OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE

SOMETIME CAPTAIN IN THE SUFFOLK REGIMENT

Cambridge:  
at the University Press  
1916

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1916

## PREFACE

**H**AD the author lived, his poems, if published at all, would not have appeared without revision; but no editorial liberties have been taken with the present text. Readers who find something in the book that appeals to them will pardon an occasional lack of finish as well as the inclusion of some verses which may seem of personal interest only.

The first place in the volume has been assigned to the title-poem. Some early poems are printed at the end. The other contents are arranged in the order of their composition, as nearly as that order can be ascertained. When the date given includes the day of the month, it has been taken from the author's manuscript; some of the other dates are approximate. Of the undated poems, XIII to XVI were received from him in the autumn of 1914, XVII to XXIV in April 1915, and XXVII was found among papers sent back recently from France. Many of the poems appeared in *The Marlburian*, and one of them was printed in *The Times Literary Supplement* for 28 October 1915. A single piece of prose, describing a night passed behind the lines, has been added.

M818465

In case any reader should ask about the author, the following information may be given. He was born at Old Aberdeen on 19 May 1895. From 1900 onwards his home was in Cambridge. He was at Marlborough from September 1908 till December 1913, when he was elected to a scholarship at University College, Oxford. After leaving school he spent a little more than six months in Germany, returning home on the outbreak of war. He was gazetted Second Lieutenant in the Seventh (Service) Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment in August 1914, Lieutenant in November, and Captain in the following August. He was sent to France on 30 May and was killed in action on 13 October 1915. "Being made perfect in a little while, he fulfilled long years."

The letter in verse, fragments of which are given on pages 73-78, was sent anonymously to an older friend who, however, discovered its authorship and replied in the words which, by his permission, are now printed on the opposite page.

12 *December* 1915

NOTE.—The second edition contains an additional poem (xxviii) which was unknown to the editor when the book was first published. The punctuation of another poem has been revised. A reference in the preface has been altered so as to suit the present edition.

29 *January* 1916

From far away there comes a Voice,  
Singing its song across the sea—  
A song to make man's heart rejoice—  
Of Marlborough and the Odyssey.

A voice that sings of Now and Then,  
Of minstrel joys and tiny towns,  
Of flowering thyme and fighting men,  
Of Sparta's sands and Marlborough's Downs.

God grant, dear Voice, one day again  
We see those Downs in April weather,  
And snuff the breeze, and smell the rain,  
And stand in C House Porch together!

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I

MARLBOROUGH

I

CROUCHED where the open upland billows down  
    Into the valley where the river flows,  
She is as any other country town,  
    That little lives or marks or hears or knows.

And she can teach but little. She has not  
    The wonder and the surging and the roar  
Of striving cities. Only things forgot  
    That once were beautiful, but now no more,

Has she to give us. Yet to one or two  
    She first brought knowledge, and it was for her  
To open first our eyes, until we knew  
    How great, immeasurably great, we were.

I, who have walked along her downs in dreams,  
And known her tenderness, and felt her might,  
And sometimes by her meadows and her streams  
Have drunk deep-storied secrets of delight,  
Have had my moments there, when I have been  
Unwittingly aware of something more,  
Some beautiful aspect, that I had seen  
With mute unspeculative eyes before;  
Have had my times, when, though the earth did wear  
Her self-same trees and grasses, I could see  
The revelation that is always there,  
But somehow is not always clear to me.

## II

So, long ago, one halted on his way  
And sent his company and cattle on;  
His caravans trooped darkling far away  
Into the night, and he was left alone.

And he was left alone. And, lo, a man  
There wrestled with him till the break of day.  
The brook was silent and the night was wan.  
And when the dawn was come, he passed away.

The sinew of the hollow of his thigh  
Was shrunken, as he wrestled there alone.  
The brook was silent, but the dawn was nigh.  
The stranger named him Israel and was gone.

And the sun rose on Jacob; and he knew  
That he was no more Jacob, but had grown  
A more immortal vaster spirit, who  
Had seen God face to face, and still lived on.

The plain that seemed to stretch away to God,  
The brook that saw and heard and knew no fear,  
Were now the self-same soul as he who stood  
And waited for his brother to draw near.

For God had wrestled with him, and was gone.  
He looked around, and only God remained.  
The dawn, the desert, he and God were one.  
—And Esau came to meet him, travel-stained.

### III

So, there, when sunset made the downs look new,  
And earth gave up her colours to the sky,  
And far away the little city grew  
Half into sight, new-visioned was my eye.

I, who have lived, and trod her lovely earth,  
Raced with her winds and listened to her birds,  
Have cared but little for their worldly worth  
Nor sought to put my passion into words.

But now it's different; and I have no rest  
Because my hand must search, dissect and spell  
The beauty that is better not expressed,  
The thing that all can feel, but none can tell.

1 *March 1914*

## II

### BARBURY CAMP

**W**E burrowed night and day with tools of lead,  
Heaped the bank up and cast it in a ring  
And hurled the earth above. And Caesar said,  
“Why, it is excellent. I like the thing.”  
We, who are dead,  
Made it, and wrought, and Caesar liked the thing.

And here we strove, and here we felt each vein  
Ice-bound, each limb fast-frozen, all night long.  
And here we held communion with the rain  
That lashed us into manhood with its thong,  
Cleansing through pain.  
And the wind visited us and made us strong.

Up from around us, numbers without name,  
Strong men and naked, vast, on either hand  
Pressing us in, they came. And the wind came  
And bitter rain, turning grey all the land.  
That was our game,  
To fight with men and storms, and it was grand.

For many days we fought them, and our sweat  
Watered the grass, making it spring up green,  
Blooming for us. And, if the wind was wet,  
Our blood wetted the wind, making it keen  
With the hatred  
And wrath and courage that our blood had been.

So, fighting men and winds and tempests, hot  
With joy and hate and battle-lust, we fell  
Where we fought. And God said, "Killed at last then?  
What?

Ye that are too strong for heaven, too clean for hell,  
(God said) stir not.  
This be your heaven, or, if ye will, your hell."



So again we fight and wrestle, and again  
Hurl the earth up and cast it in a ring.  
But when the wind comes up, driving the rain  
(Each rain-drop a fiery steed), and the mists rolling  
Up from the plain,  
This wild procession, this impetuous thing,

Hold us amazed. We mount the wind-cars, then  
Whip up the steeds and drive through all the world,  
Searching to find somewhere some brethren,  
Sons of the winds and waters of the world.  
We, who were men,  
Have sought, and found no men in all this world.

Wind, that has blown here always ceaselessly,  
Bringing, if any man can understand,  
Might to the mighty, freedom to the free;  
Wind, that has caught us, cleansed us, made us grand,  
Wind that is we  
(We that were men)—make men in all this land,

That so may live and wrestle and hate that when  
They fall at last exultant, as we fell,  
And come to God, God may say, "Do you come then  
Mildly enquiring, is it heaven or hell?  
Why! Ye were men!  
Back to your winds and rains. Be these your heaven and  
hell!"

24 *March* 1913

### III

#### WHAT YOU WILL

O COME and see, it's such a sight,  
So many boys all doing right:  
To see them underneath the yoke,  
Blindfolded by the elder folk,  
Move at a most impressive rate  
Along the way that is called straight.  
O, it is comforting to know  
They're in the way they ought to go.  
But don't you think it's far more gay  
To see them slowly leave the way  
And limp and loose themselves and fall?  
O, that's the nicest thing of all.

I love to see this sight, for then  
I know they are becoming men,  
And they are tiring of the shrine  
Where things are really not divine.

I do not know if it seems brave  
The youthful spirit to enslave,  
And hedge about, lest it should grow.  
I don't know if it's better so  
In the long end. I only know  
That when I have a son of mine,  
He shan't be made to droop and pine,  
Bound down and forced by rule and rod  
To serve a God who is no God.  
But I'll put custom on the shelf  
And make him find his God himself.

Perhaps he'll find him in a tree,  
Some hollow trunk, where you can see.  
Perhaps the daisies in the sod  
Will open out and show him God.  
Or will he meet him in the roar  
Of breakers as they beat the shore?  
Or in the spiky stars that shine?  
Or in the rain (where I found mine)?  
Or in the city's giant moan?  
—A God who will be all his own,  
To whom he can address a prayer  
And love him, for he is so fair,  
And see with eyes that are not dim  
And build a temple meet for him.

*June 1913*

#### IV

#### ROOKS

THERE, where the rusty iron lies,  
The rooks are cawing all the day.  
Perhaps no man, until he dies,  
Will understand them, what they say.

The evening makes the sky like clay.  
The slow wind waits for night to rise.  
The world is half-content. But they

Still trouble all the trees with cries,  
That know, and cannot put away,  
The yearning to the soul that flies  
From day to night, from night to day.

21 *June* 1913

V

ROOKS (II)

THERE is such cry in all these birds,  
More than can ever be express'd;  
If I should put it into words,  
You would agree it were not best  
To wake such wonder from its rest.

But since to-night the world is still  
And only they and I astir,  
We are united, will to will,  
By bondage tighter, tenderer  
Than any lovers ever were.

And if, of too much labouring,  
All that I see around should die  
(There is such sleep in each green thing,  
Such weariness in all the sky),  
We would live on, these birds and I.

Yet how? since everything must pass  
At evening with the sinking sun,  
And Christ is gone, and Barabbas,  
Judas and Jesus, gone, clean gone,  
Then how shall I live on?

Yet surely, Judas must have heard  
Amidst his torments the long cry  
Of some lone Israelitish bird,  
And on it, ere he went to die,  
Thrown all his spirit's agony.



And that immortal cry which welled  
For Judas, ever afterwards  
Passion on passion still has swelled  
And sweetened, till to-night these birds  
Will take my words, will take my words,

And wrapping them in music meet  
Will sing their spirit through the sky,  
Strange and unsatisfied and sweet—  
That, when stock-dead am I, am I,  
O, these will never die!

*July 1913*

## VI

### STONES

**T**HIS field is almost white with stones  
That cumber all its thirsty crust.  
And underneath, I know, are bones.  
And all around is death and dust.

And if you love a livelier hue—  
O, if you love the youth of year,  
When all is clean and green and new,  
Depart. There is no summer here.

Albeit, to me there lingers yet  
In this forbidding stony dress  
The impotent and dim regret  
For some forgotten restlessness.

Dumb, imperceptibly astir,  
    These relics of an ancient race,  
These men, in whom the dead bones were,  
    Still fortifying their resting-place.

Their field of life was white with stones;  
    Good fruit to earth they never brought.  
O, in these bleached and buried bones  
    Was neither love nor faith nor thought.

But like the wind in this bleak place,  
    Bitter and bleak and sharp they grew,  
And bitterly they ran their race,  
    A brutal, bad, unkindly crew:

Souls like the dry earth, hearts like stone,  
    Brains like that barren bramble-tree:  
Stern, sterile, senseless, mute, unknown—  
    But bold, O, bolder far than we!

14 *July* 1913

## VII

### EAST KENNET CHURCH AT EVENING

I STOOD amongst the corn, and watched  
The evening coming down.  
The rising vale was like a queen,  
And the dim church her crown.

Crown-like it stood against the hills.  
Its form was passing fair.  
I almost saw the tribes go up  
To offer incense there.

And far below the long vale stretched.  
As a sleeper she did seem  
That after some brief restlessness  
Has now begun to dream.

(All day the wakefulness of men,  
    Their lives and labours brief,  
Have broken her long troubled sleep.  
    Now, evening brings relief.)

There was no motion there, nor sound.  
    She did not seem to rise.  
Yet was she wrapping herself in  
    Her grey of night-disguise.

For now no church nor tree nor fold  
    Was visible to me:  
Only that fading into one  
    Which God must sometimes see.

No coloured glory streaked the sky  
    To mark the sinking sun.  
There was no redness in the west  
    To tell that day was done.

Only, the greyness of the eve  
Grew fuller than before.  
And, in its fulness, it made one  
Of what had once been more.

There was much beauty in that sight  
That man must not long see.  
God dropped the kindly veil of night  
Between its end and me.

24 *July* 1913

## VIII

### AUTUMN DAWN

**A**ND this is morning. Would you think  
That this was the morning, when the land  
Is full of heavy eyes that blink  
Half-opened, and the tall trees stand  
Too tired to shake away the drops  
Of passing night that cling around  
Their branches and weigh down their tops:  
And the grey sky leans on the ground?  
The thrush sings once or twice, but stops  
Affrighted by the silent sound.  
The sheep, scarce moving, munches, moans.  
The slow herd mumbles, thick with phlegm.  
The grey road-mender, hacking stones,  
Is now become as one of them.

Old mother Earth has rubbed her eyes  
And stayed, so senseless, lying down.  
Old mother is too tired to rise  
And lay aside her grey nightgown,  
And come with singing and with strength  
In loud exuberance of day,  
Swift-darting. She is tired at length,  
Done up, past bearing, you would say.  
She'll come no more in lust of strife,  
In hedges' leap, and wild birds' cries,  
In winds that cut you like a knife,  
In days of laughter and swift skies,  
That palpably pulsate with life,  
With life that kills, with life that dies.  
But in a morning such as this  
Is neither life nor death to see,  
Only that state which some call bliss,  
Grey hopeless immortality.



Earth is at length bedrid. She is  
Supinest of the things that be:  
And stilly, heavy with long years,  
Brings forth such days in dumb regret,  
Immortal days, that rise in tears,  
And cannot, though they strive to, set.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mists do move. The wind takes breath.  
The sun appeareth over there,  
And with red fingers hasteneth  
From Earth's grey bed the clothes to tear,  
And strike the heavy mist's dank tent.  
And Earth uprises with a sigh.  
She is astir. She is not spent.  
And yet she lives and yet can die.  
The grey road-mender from the ditch  
Looks up. He has not looked before.  
The stunted tree sways like the witch  
It was: 'tis living witch once more.

The winds are washen. In the deep  
Dew of the morn they've washed. The skies  
Are changing dress. The clumsy sheep  
Bound, and earth's many bosoms rise,  
And earth's green tresses spring and leap  
About her brow. The earth has eyes,  
The earth has voice, the earth has breath,  
As o'er the land and through the air,  
With wingéd sandals, Life and Death  
Speed hand in hand—that winsome pair!

16 *September* 1913

## IX

### RETURN

**S**TILL stand the downs so wise and wide?  
Still shake the trees their tresses grey?  
I thought their beauty might have died  
Since I had been away.

I might have known the things I love,  
The winds, the flocking birds' full cry,  
The trees that toss, the downs that move,  
Were longer things than I.

Lo, earth that bows before the wind,  
With wild green children overgrown,  
And all her bosoms, many-whinned,  
Receive me as their own.

The birds are hushed and fled: the cows  
Have ceased at last to make long moan.  
They only think to browse and browse  
Until the night is grown.

The wind is stiller than it was,  
And dumbness holds the closing day.  
The earth says not a word, because  
It has no word to say.

The dear soft grasses under foot  
Are silent to the listening ear.  
Yet beauty never can be mute,  
And some will always hear.

18 *September* 1913

X

RICHARD JEFFERIES

(LIDDINGTON CASTLE)

I SEE the vision of the Vale  
Rise teeming to the rampart Down,  
The fields and, far below, the pale  
Red-roofédness of Swindon town.

But though I see all things remote,  
I cannot see them with the eyes  
With which ere now the man from Coate  
Looked down and wondered and was wise.

He knew the healing balm of night,  
The strong and sweeping joy of day,  
The sensible and dear delight  
Of life, the pity of decay.

And many wondrous words he wrote,  
And something good to man he showed,  
About the entering in of Coate,  
There, on the dusty Swindon road.

19 *September* 1913

## XI

J. B.

THERE'S still a horse on Granham hill,  
And still the Kennet moves, and still  
Four Miler sways and is not still.

But where is her interpreter?

The downs are blown into dismay,  
The stunted trees seem all astray,  
Looking for someone clad in grey  
And carrying a golf-club thing;

Who, them when he had lived among,  
Gave them what they desired, a tongue.  
Their words he gave them to be sung  
Perhaps were few, but they were true.

The trees, the downs, on either hand,  
Still stand, as he said they would stand.  
But look, the rain in all the land  
    Makes all things dim with tears of him.

And recently the Kennet croons,  
And winds are playing widowed tunes.  
—He has not left our “toun o’ touns,”  
    But taken it away with him!

*October 1913*



## XII

### THE OTHER WISE MAN

(SCENE: *A valley with a wood on one side and a road running up to a distant hill : as it might be, the valley to the east of West Woods, that runs up to Oare Hill, only much larger. TIME: Autumn. Four wise men are marching hillward along the road.*)

#### ONE WISE MAN

I wonder where the valley ends?  
On, comrades, on.

#### ANOTHER WISE MAN

The rain-red road,  
Still shining sinuously, bends  
Leagues upwards.

A THIRD WISE MAN

To the hill, O friends,  
To seek the star that once has glowed  
Before us; turning not to right  
Nor left, nor backward once looking.  
Till we have clomb—and with the night  
We see the King.

ALL THE WISE MEN

The King! The King!

THE THIRD WISE MAN

Long is the road but—

A FOURTH WISE MAN

Brother, see,

- There, to the left, a very aisle  
Composed of every sort of tree—

THE FIRST WISE MAN

Still onward—

THE FOURTH WISE MAN

Oak and beech and birch,  
Like a church, but homelier than church,  
The black trunks for its walls of tile;  
Its roof, old leaves; its floor, beech nuts;  
The squirrels its congregation—

THE SECOND WISE MAN

Tuts!

For still we journey—

THE FOURTH WISE MAN

But the sun weaves  
A water-web across the grass,  
Binding their tops. You must not pass  
The water cobweb.

THE THIRD WISE MAN

Hush! I say.  
Onward and upward till the day—

THE FOURTH WISE MAN

Brother, that tree has crimson leaves.  
You'll never see its like again.  
Don't miss it. Look, it's bright with rain—

THE FIRST WISE MAN

O prating tongue. On, on.

THE FOURTH WISE MAN

And there  
A toad-stool, nay, a goblin stool.  
No toad sat on a thing so fair.  
Wait, while I pluck—and there's—and here's  
A whole ring...what?...berries?

*(The Fourth Wise Man drops behind, botanizing.)*

## THE WISEST OF THE REMAINING THREE WISE MEN

O fool!

Fool, fallen in this vale of tears.  
His hand had touched the plough: his eyes  
Looked back: no more with us, his peers,  
He'll climb the hill and front the skies  
And see the Star, the King, the Prize.  
But we, the seekers, we who see  
Beyond the mists of transiency—  
Our feet down in the valley still  
Are set, our eyes are on the hill.  
Last night the star of God has shone,  
And so we journey, up and on,  
With courage clad, with swiftness shod,  
All thoughts of earth behind us cast,  
Until we see the lights of God,  
—And what will be the crown at last?

### ALL THREE WISE MEN

On, on.

*(They pass on : it is already evening when the Other Wise Man limps along the road, still botanizing.)*

### THE OTHER WISE MAN

A vale of tears, they said!

A valley made of woes and fears,  
To be passed by with muffled head  
Quickly. I have not seen the tears,  
Unless they take the rain for tears,  
And certainly the place is wet.  
Rain laden leaves are ever licking  
Your cheeks and hands...I can't get on.  
There's a toad-stool that wants picking.  
There, just there, a little up,  
What strange things to look upon  
With pink hood and orange cup!

And there are acorns, yellow—green...  
They said the King was at the end.  
They must have been  
Wrong. For here, here, I intend  
To search for him, for surely here  
Are all the wares of the old year,  
And all the beauty and bright prize,  
And all God's colours meetly showed,  
Green for the grass, blue for the skies,  
Red for the rain upon the road;  
And anything you like for trees,  
But chiefly yellow brown and gold,  
Because the year is growing old  
And loves to paint her children these.  
I tried to follow...but, what do you think?  
The mushrooms here are pink!  
And there's old clover with black polls,  
Black-headed clover, black as coals,  
And toad-stools, sleek as ink!

And there are such heaps of little turns  
Off the road, wet with old rain:  
Each little vegetable lane  
Of moss and old decaying ferns,  
Beautiful in decay,  
Snatching a beauty from whatever may  
Be their lot, dark-red and luscious: till there pass'd  
Over the many-coloured earth a grey  
Film. It was evening coming down at last.  
And all things hid their faces, covering up  
Their peak or hood or bonnet or bright cup  
In greyness, and the beauty faded fast,  
With all the many-coloured coat of day.  
Then I looked up, and lo! the sunset sky  
Had taken the beauty from the autumn earth.  
Such colour, O such colour, could not die.  
The trees stood black against such revelry  
Of lemon-gold and purple and crimson dye.  
And even as the trees, so I



Stood still and worshipped, though by evening's birth  
I should have capped the hills and seen the King.  
The King? The King?  
I must be miles away from my journey's end;  
The others must be now nearing  
The summit, glad. By now they wend  
Their way far, far, ahead, no doubt.  
I wonder if they've reached the end.  
If they have, I have not heard them shout.

1 *December* 1913

### XIII

#### THE SONG OF THE UNGIRT RUNNERS

**W**E swing ungirded hips,  
And lightened are our eyes,  
The rain is on our lips,  
We do not run for prize.  
We know not whom we trust  
Nor whitherward we fare,  
But we run because we must  
Through the great wide air.

The waters of the seas  
Are troubled as by storm.  
The tempest strips the trees  
And does not leave them warm.  
Does the tearing tempest pause?  
Do the tree-tops ask it why?  
So we run without a cause  
'Neath the big bare sky.

The rain is on our lips,  
We do not run for prize.  
But the storm the water whips  
And the wave howls to the skies.  
The winds arise and strike it  
And scatter it like sand,  
And we run because we like it  
    Through the broad bright land.

## XIV

### GERMAN RAIN

**T**HE heat came down and sapped away my powers.  
The laden heat came down and drowned my brain,  
Till through the weight of overcoming hours  
I felt the rain.

Then suddenly I saw what more to see  
I never thought: old things renewed, retrieved.  
The rain that fell in England fell on me,  
And I believed.

XV

WHOM THEREFORE WE IGNORANTLY WORSHIP

THESE things are silent. Though it may be told  
Of luminous deeds that lighten land and sea,  
Strong sounding actions with broad minstrelsy  
Of praise, strange hazards and adventures bold,  
We hold to the old things that grow not old:  
Blind, patient, hungry, hopeless (without fee  
Of all our hunger and unhope are we),  
To the first ultimate instinct, to God we hold.

They flicker, glitter, flicker. But we bide,  
We, the blind weavers of an intense fate,  
Asking but this—that we may be denied:  
Desiring only desire insatiate,  
Unheard, unnamed, unnoticed, crucified  
To our unutterable faith, we wait.

## XVI

### TO POETS

**W**E are the homeless, even as you,  
Who hope and never can begin.  
Our hearts are wounded through and through  
Like yours, but our hearts bleed within.  
We too make music, but our tones  
'Scape not the barrier of our bones.

We have no comeliness like you.  
We toil, unlovely, and we spin.  
We start, return: we wind, undo:  
We hope, we err, we strive, we sin,  
We love: your love's not greater, but  
The lips of our love's might stay shut.

We have the evil spirits too  
That shake our soul with battle-din.  
But we have an eviller spirit than you,  
We have a dumb spirit within:  
The exceeding bitter agony  
But not the exceeding bitter cry.

## XVII

**A** HUNDRED thousand million mites we go  
Wheeling and tacking o'er the eternal plain,  
Some black with death—and some are white with woe.  
Who sent us forth? Who takes us home again?

And there is sound of hymns of praise—to whom?  
And curses—on whom curses?—snap the air.  
And there is hope goes hand in hand with gloom,  
And blood and indignation and despair.

And there is murmuring of the multitude  
And blindness and great blindness, until some  
Step forth and challenge blind Vicissitude  
Who tramples on them: so that fewer come.



And nations, ankle-deep in love or hate,  
Throw darts or kisses all the unwitting hour  
Beside the ominous unseen tide of fate;  
And there is emptiness and drink and power.

And some are mounted on swift steeds of thought  
And some drag sluggish feet of stable toil.  
Yet all, as though they furiously sought,  
Twist turn and tussle, close and cling and coil.

A hundred thousand million mites we sway  
Writhing and tossing on the eternal plain,  
Some black with death—but most are bright with Day!  
Who sent us forth? Who brings us home again?

## XVIII

### DEUS LOQUITUR

**T**HAT'S what I am: a thing of no desire,  
With no path to discover and no plea  
To offer up, so be my altar fire  
May burn before the hearth continuously,  
To be  
For wayward men a steadfast light to see.

They know me in the morning of their days,  
But ere noontide forsake me, to discern  
New lore and hear new riddles. But moonrays  
Bring them back footsore, humble, bent, a-burn  
To turn  
And warm them by my fire which they did spurn.

They flock together like tired birds. "We sought  
Full many stars in many skies to see.  
But ever knowledge disappointment brought.  
Thy light alone, Lord, burneth steadfastly."  
Ah me!  
Then it is I who fain would wayward be.

## XIX

### TWO SONGS FROM IBSEN'S DRAMATIC POEMS

#### I BRAND

**T**HOU trod'st the shifting sand path where man's race is.  
The print of thy soft sandals is still clear.  
I too have trodden it those prints a-near,  
But the sea washes out my tired foot-traces.  
And all that thou hast healed and holpen here  
I yearned to heal and help and wipe the tear  
Away. But still I trod unpeopled spaces.  
I had no twelve to follow my pure paces.  
For I had thy misgivings and thy fear,  
Thy crown of scorn, thy suffering's sharp spear,  
Thy hopes, thy longings—only not thy dear  
Love (for my crying love would no man hear),  
Thy will to love, but not thy love's sweet graces,  
That deep firm foothold which no sea erases.  
I think that thou wast I in bygone places  
In an intense eliminated year.  
Now born again in days that are more drear  
I wander unfulfilled: and see strange faces.

## II PEER GYNT

**W**HEN he was young and beautiful and bold  
We hated him, for he was very strong.  
But when he came back home again, quite old,  
And wounded too, we could not hate him long.

For kingliness and conquest pranced he forth  
Like some high-stepping charger bright with foam.  
And south he strode and east and west and north  
With need of crowns and never need of home.

Enraged we heard high tidings of his strength  
And cursed his long forgetfulness. We swore  
That should he come back home some eve at length,  
We would deny him, we would bar the door!

And then he came. The sound of those tired feet!  
And all our home and all our hearts are his,  
Where bitterness, grown weary, turns to sweet,  
And envy, purged by longing, pity is.

And pillows rest beneath the withering cheek,  
And hands are laid the battered brows above,  
And he whom we had hated, waxen weak,  
First in his weakness learns a little love.

XX

**I**F I have suffered pain  
It is because I would.  
I willed it. 'Tis no good  
To murmur or complain.  
I have not served the law  
That keeps the earth so fair  
And gives her clothes to wear,  
Raiment of joy and awe.

For all that bow to bless  
That law shall sure abide.  
But man shall not abide,  
And hence his gloriousness.  
Lo, evening earth doth lie  
All-beauteous and all peace.  
Man only does not cease  
From striving and from cry.

Sun sets in peace: and soon  
The moon will shower her peace.  
O law-abiding moon,  
You hold your peace in fee!  
Man, leastways, will not be  
Down-bounden to these laws.  
Man's spirit sees no cause  
To serve such laws as these.

There yet are many seas  
For man to wander in.  
He yet must find out sin,  
If aught of pleasance there  
Remain for him to store,  
His rovings to increase,  
In quest of many a shore  
Forbidden still to fare.



Peace sleeps the earth upon,  
And sweet peace on the hill.  
The waves that whimper still  
At their long law-serving  
(O flowing sad complaint!)  
Come on and are back drawn.  
Man only owns no king,  
Man only is not faint.

You see, the earth is bound.  
You see, the man is free.  
For glorious liberty  
He suffers and would die.  
Grudge not then suffering  
Or chastisement cry.  
O let his pain abound,  
Earth's truant and earth's king!

## XXI

### TO GERMANY

**Y**OU are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,  
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.  
But gropers both through fields of thought confined  
We stumble and we do not understand.  
You only saw your future bigly planned,  
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,  
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,  
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.

When it is peace, then we may view again  
With new-won eyes each other's truer form  
And wonder. Grown more loving-kind and warm  
We'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,  
When it is peace. But until peace, the storm  
The darkness and the thunder and the rain.

## XXII

**A**LL the hills and vales along  
Earth is bursting into song,  
And the singers are the chaps  
Who are going to die perhaps.  
    O sing, marching men,  
    Till the valleys ring again.  
    Give your gladness to earth's keeping,  
    So be glad, when you are sleeping.

Cast away regret and rue,  
Think what you are marching to.  
Little live, great pass.  
Jesus Christ and Barabbas  
Were found the same day.  
This died, that went his way.  
    So sing with joyful breath.  
    For why, you are going to death.  
    Teeming earth will surely store  
    All the gladness that you pour.

Earth that never doubts nor fears,  
Earth that knows of death, not tears,  
Earth that bore with joyful ease  
Hemlock for Socrates,  
Earth that blossomed and was glad  
'Neath the cross that Christ had,  
Shall rejoice and blossom too  
When the bullet reaches you.  
Wherefore, men marching  
On the road to death, sing!  
Pour your gladness on earth's head,  
So be merry, so be dead.

From the hills and valleys earth  
Shouts back the sound of mirth,  
Tramp of feet and lilt of song  
Ringing all the road along.  
All the music of their going,  
Ringing swinging glad song-throwing,  
Earth will echo still, when foot  
Lies numb and voice mute.

On, marching men, on  
To the gates of death with song.  
Sow your gladness for earth's reaping,  
So you may be glad, though sleeping.  
Strew your gladness on earth's bed,  
So be merry, so be dead.

## XXIII

### LE REVENANT

**H**E trod the oft-remembered lane  
    (Now smaller-seeming than before  
When first he left his father's door  
For newer things), but still quite plain

(Though half-benighted now) upstood  
Old landmarks, ghosts across the lane  
That brought the Bygone back again:  
Shorn haystacks and the rooky wood;

The guide post, too, which once he clomb  
To read the figures: fourteen miles  
To Swindon, four to Clinton Stiles,  
And only half a mile to home:

And far away the one homestead, where—  
Behind the day now not quite set  
So that he saw in silhouette  
Its chimneys still stand black and bare—

He noticed that the trees were not  
So big as when he journeyed last  
That way. For greatly now he passed  
Striding above the hedges, hot

With hopings, as he passed by where  
A lamp before him glanced and stayed  
Across his path, so that his shade  
Seemed like a giant's moving there.

The dullness of the sunken sun  
He marked not, nor how dark it grew,  
Nor that strange flapping bird that flew  
Above: he thought but of the One....

He topped the crest and crossed the fence,  
Noticed the garden that it grew  
As erst, noticed the hen-house too  
(The kennel had been altered since).

It seemed so unchanged and so still.  
(Could it but be the past arisen  
For one short night from out of prison?)  
He reached the big-bowed window-sill,

Lifted the window sash with care,  
Then, gaily throwing aside the blind,  
Shouted. It was a shock to find  
That he was not remembered there.



At once he felt not all his pain,  
But murmuringly apologised,  
Turned, once more sought the undersized  
Blown trees, and the long lanky lane,

Wondering and pondering on, past where  
A lamp before him glanced and stayed  
Across his path, so that his shade  
Seemed like a giant's moving there.

## XXIV

### LOST

**A**CROSS my past imaginings  
Has dropped a blindness silent and slow.  
My eye is bent on other things  
Than those it once did see and know.

I may not think on those dear lands  
(O far away and long ago!)  
Where the old battered signpost stands  
And silently the four roads go

East, west, south and north,  
And the cold winter winds do blow.  
And what the evening will bring forth  
Is not for me nor you to know.

## XXV

### EXPECTANS EXPECTAVI

FROM morn to midnight, all day through,  
I laugh and play as others do,  
I sin and chatter, just the same  
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage  
I dance and tumble and do rage  
So vehemently, I scarcely see  
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not  
Visit, a heart I have forgot,  
A self that I have never met,  
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul  
Unwitting I keep white and whole  
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care  
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands  
And listening ears Thy servant stands,  
Call Thou early, call Thou late,  
To Thy great service dedicate.

*May 1915*

## XXVI

### TWO SONNETS

#### I

**S**AINTS have adored the lofty soul of you.  
Poets have whitened at your high renown.  
We stand among the many millions who  
Do hourly wait to pass your pathway down.  
You, so familiar, once were strange: we tried  
To live as of your presence unaware.  
But now in every road on every side  
We see your straight and steadfast signpost there.

I think it like that signpost in my land  
Hoary and tall, which pointed me to go  
Upward, into the hills, on the right hand,  
Where the mists swim and the winds shriek and blow,  
A homeless land and friendless, but a land  
I did not know and that I wished to know.

II

Such, such is Death: no triumph: no defeat:  
Only an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean,  
A merciful putting away of what has been.

And this we know: Death is not Life effete,  
Life crushed, the broken pail. We who have seen  
So marvellous things know well the end not yet.

Victor and vanquished are a-one in death:  
Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say  
"Come, what was your record when you drew breath?"  
But a big blot has hid each yesterday  
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.  
And your bright Promise, withered long and sped,  
Is touched, stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet  
And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.

12 *June* 1915

## XXVII

WHEN you see millions of the mouthless dead  
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,  
Say not soft things as other men have said,  
That you'll remember. For you need not so.  
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know  
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?  
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.  
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.  
Say only this, "They are dead." Then add thereto,  
"Yet many a better one has died before."  
Then, scanning all the o'ercrowded mass, should you  
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,  
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.  
Great death has made all his for evermore.

## XXVIII

**T**HERE is such change in all those fields,  
Such motion rhythmic, ordered, free,  
Where ever-glancing summer yields  
Birth, fragrance, sunlight, immanency,  
To make us view our rights of birth.  
What shall we do? How shall we die?  
We, captives of a roaming earth,  
Mid shades that life and light deny.  
Blank summer's surfeit heaves in mist;  
Dumb earth basks dewy-washed; while still  
We whom Intelligence has kissed  
Do make us shackles of our will.  
And yet I know in each loud brain,  
Round-clamped with laws and learning so,  
Is madness more and lust of strain  
Than earth's jerked godlings e'er can know.



The false Delilah of our brain  
Has set us round the millstone going.  
O lust of roving! lust of pain!  
Our hair will not be long in growing.  
Like blinded Samson round we go.  
We hear the grindstone groan and cry.  
Yet we are kings, we know, we know.  
What shall we do? How shall we die?

Take but our pauper's gift of birth,  
O let us from the grindstone free!  
And tread the maddening gladdening earth  
In strength close-braced with purity.  
The earth is old; we ever new.  
Our eyes should see no other sense  
Than this, eternally to do—  
Our joy, our task, our recompense;  
Up unexploréd mountains move,  
Track tireless through great wastes afar,  
Nor slumber in the arms of love,  
Nor tremble on the brink of war;

Make Beauty and make Rest give place,  
Mock Prudence loud—and she is gone,  
Smite Satisfaction on the face  
And tread the ghost of Ease upon.  
Light-lipped and singing press we hard  
Over old earth which now is worn,  
Triumphant, buffeted and scarred,  
By billows howled at, tempest-torn,  
Toward blue horizons far away  
(Which do not give the rest we need,  
But some long strife, more than this play,  
Some task that will be stern indeed)—  
We ever new, we ever young,  
We happy creatures of a day!  
What will the gods say, seeing us strung  
As nobly and as taut as they?

## XXIX

**I** HAVE not brought my Odyssey  
With me here across the sea;  
But you'll remember, when I say  
How, when they went down Sparta way,  
To sandy Sparta, long ere dawn  
Horses were harnessed, rations drawn,  
Equipment polished sparkling bright,  
And breakfasts swallowed (as the white  
Of Eastern heavens turned to gold)—  
The dogs barked, swift farewells were told.  
The sun springs up, the horses neigh,  
Crackles the whip thrice—then away!  
From sun-go-up to sun-go-down  
All day across the sandy down  
The gallant horses galloped, till  
The wind across the downs more chill

Blew, the sun sank and all the road  
Was darkened, that it only showed  
Right at the end the town's red light  
And twilight glimmering into night.

The horses never slackened till  
They reached the doorway and stood still.  
Then came the knock, the unlading; then  
The honey-sweet converse of men,  
The splendid bath, the change of dress,  
Then—O the grandeur of their Mess,  
The henchmen, the prim stewardess!  
And O the breaking of old ground,  
The tales, after the port went round!  
(The wondrous wiles of old Odysseus,  
Old Agamemnon and his misuse  
Of his command, and that young chit  
Paris—who didn't care a bit  
For Helen—only to annoy her  
He did it really, κ.τ.λ.)

But soon they led amidst the din  
The honey-sweet *αοιδὸς* in,  
Whose eyes were blind, whose soul had sight,  
Who knew the fame of men in fight—  
Bard of white hair and trembling foot,  
Who sang whatever God might put  
Into his heart.

And there he sung,  
Those war-worn veterans among,  
Tales of great war and strong hearts wrung,  
Of clash of arms, of council's brawl,  
Of beauty that must early fall,  
Of battle hate and battle joy  
By the old windy walls of Troy.  
They felt that they were unreal then,  
Visions and shadow-forms, not men.  
But those the Bard did sing and say  
(Some were their comrades, some were they)  
Took shape and loomed and strengthened more  
Greatly than they had guessed of yore.

And now the fight begins again,  
The old war-joy, the old war-pain.  
Sons of one school across the sea  
We have no fear to fight—

\* \* \* \* \*

And soon, O soon, I do not doubt it,  
With the body or without it,  
We shall all come tumbling down  
To our old wrinkled red-capped town.  
Perhaps the road up Ilsley way,  
The old ridge-track, will be my way.  
High up among the sheep and sky,  
Look down on Wantage, passing by,  
And see the smoke from Swindon town;  
And then full left at Liddington,  
Where the four winds of heaven meet  
The earth-blest traveller to greet.  
And then my face is toward the south,  
There is a singing on my mouth:

Away to rightward I descry  
My Barbury ensconced in sky,  
Far underneath the Ogbourne twins,  
And at my feet the thyme and whins,  
The grasses with their little crowns  
Of gold, the lovely Aldbourne downs,  
And that old signpost (well I knew  
That crazy signpost, arms askew,  
Old mother of the four grass ways).  
And then my mouth is dumb with praise,  
For, past the wood and chalkpit tiny,  
A glimpse of Marlborough *ἐπατεινή!*  
So I descend beneath the rail  
To warmth and welcome and wassail.

\* \* \* \* \*

This from the battered trenches—rough,  
Jingling and tedious enough.  
And so I sign myself to you:  
One, who some crooked pathways knew

Round Bedwyn: who could scarcely leave  
The Downs on a December eve:  
Was at his happiest in shorts,  
And got—not many good reports!  
Small skill of rhyming in his hand—  
But you'll forgive—you'll understand.

12 *July* 1915



XXX

IN MEMORIAM

S.C.W., V.C.

**T**HERE is no fitter end than this.  
No need is now to yearn nor sigh.  
We know the glory that is his,  
A glory that can never die.

Surely we knew it long before,  
Knew all along that he was made  
For a swift radiant morning, for  
A sacrificing swift night-shade.

8 *September* 1915

## XXXI

### BEHIND THE LINES

WE are now at the end of a few days' rest, a kilometre behind the lines. Except for the farmyard noises (new style) it might almost be the little village that first took us to its arms six weeks ago. It has been a fine day, following on a day's rain, so that the earth smells like spring. I have just managed to break off a long conversation with the farmer in charge, a tall thin stooping man with sad eyes, in trouble about his land: les Anglais stole his peas, trod down his corn and robbed his young potatoes: he told it as a father telling of infanticide. There may have been fifteen francs' worth of damage done; he will never get compensation out of those shifty Belgian burgomasters; but it was not exactly the fifteen francs but the invasion of the soil that had been his for forty years, in which the weather was his only

enemy, that gave him a kind of Niobe's dignity to his complaint.

Meanwhile there is the usual evening sluggishness. Close by, a quickfirer is pounding away its allowance of a dozen shells a day. It is like a cow coughing. Eastward there begins a sound (all sounds begin at sundown and continue intermittently till midnight, reaching their zenith at about 9 p.m. and then dying away as sleepiness claims their masters)—a sound like a motor-cycle race—thousands of motor-cycles tearing round and round a track, with cut-outs out: it is really a pair of machine guns firing. And now one sound awakens another. The old cow coughing has started the motor-bykes: and now at intervals of a few minutes come express trains in our direction: you can hear them rushing toward us; they pass going straight for the town behind us: and you hear them begin to slow down as they reach the town: they will soon stop: but no, every time, just before they reach it, is a tremendous railway accident. At least, it must be a railway accident, there is so much noise, and you can see the dust that the wreckage scatters. Sometimes the train behind comes very close, but

it too smashes on the wreckage of its forerunners. A tremendous cloud of dust, and then the groans. So many trains and accidents start the cow coughing again: only another cow this time, somewhere behind us, a tremendous-sized cow, *θαυμάσιον ὄσον*, with awful whooping-cough. It must be a buffalo: this cough must burst its sides. And now someone starts sliding down the stairs on a tin tray, to soften the heart of the cow, make it laugh and cure its cough. The din he makes is appalling. He is beating the tray with a broom now, every two minutes a stroke: he has certainly stopped the cow by this time, probably killed it. He will leave off soon (thanks to the "shell tragedy"): we know he can't last.

It is now almost dark: come out and see the fireworks. While waiting for them to begin you can notice how pale and white the corn is in the summer twilight: no wonder with all this whooping-cough about. And the motor-cycles: notice how all these races have at least a hundred entries: there is never a single cycle going. And why are there no birds coming back to roost? Where is the lark? I haven't heard him all to-day. He must have got whooping-cough as

well, or be staying at home through fear of the cow. I think it will rain to-morrow, but there have been no swallows circling low, stroking their breasts on the full ears of corn. Anyhow, it is night now, but the circus does not close till twelve. Look! there is the first of them! The fireworks are beginning. Red flares shooting up high into the night, or skimming low over the ground, like the swallows that are not: and rockets bursting into stars. See how they illumine that patch of ground a mile in front. See it, it is deadly pale in their searching light: ghastly, I think, and featureless except for two big lines of eyebrows ashy white, parallel along it, raised a little from its surface. Eyebrows. Where are the eyes? Hush, there are no eyes. What those shooting flares illumine is a mole. A long thin mole. Burrowing by day, and shoving a timorous enquiring snout above the ground by night. Look, did you see it? No, you cannot see it from here. But were you a good deal nearer, you would see behind that snout a long and endless row of sharp shining teeth. The rockets catch the light from these teeth and the teeth glitter: they are silently removed from the poison-spitting gums of the mole. For the mole's gums spit fire and, they say, send

something more concrete than fire darting into the night. Even when its teeth are off. But you cannot see all this from here: you can only see the rockets and then for a moment the pale ground beneath. But it is quite dark now.

And now for the fun of the fair! You will hear soon the riding-master crack his whip—why, there it is. Listen, a thousand whips are cracking, whipping the horses round the ring. At last! The fun of the circus is begun. For the motor-cycle team race has started off again: and the whips are cracking all: and the waresman starts again, beating his loud tin tray to attract the customers: and the cows in the cattle-show start coughing, coughing: and the firework display is at its best: and the circus specials come one after another bearing the merry makers back to town, all to the inevitable crash, the inevitable accident. It can't last long: these accidents are so frequent, they'll all get soon killed off, I hope. Yes, it is diminishing. The train service is cancelled (and time too): the cows have stopped coughing: and the cycle race is done. Only the kids who have bought new whips at the fair continue to crack them: and unused rockets that lie about the ground are still sent up occasionally. But

now the children are being driven off to bed: only an occasional whip-crack now (perhaps the child is now the sufferer): and the tired showmen going over the ground pick up the rocket-sticks and dead flares. At least I suppose this is what must be happening: for occasionally they still find one that has not gone off and send it up out of mere perversity. Else what silence!

It must be midnight now. Yes, it is midnight. But before you go to bed, bend down, put your ear against the ground. What do you hear? "I hear an endless tapping and a tramping to and fro: both are muffled: but they come from everywhere. Tap, tap, tap: pick, pick, pick: tra-mp, tra-mp, tra-mp." So you see the circus-goers are not all gone to sleep. There is noise coming from the womb of earth, noise of men who tap and mine and dig and pass to and fro on their watch. What you have seen is the foam and froth of war: but underground is labour and throbbing and long watch. Which will one day bear their fruit. They will set the circus on fire. Then what pandemonium! Let us hope it will not be to-morrow!

15 *July* 1915

## EARLIER POEMS



## XXXII

### A CALL TO ACTION

#### I

**A** THOUSAND years have passed away,  
Cast back your glances on the scene,  
Compare this England of to-day  
With England as she once has been.

Fast beat the pulse of living then:  
The hum of movement, throb of war,  
The rushing mighty sound of men  
Reverberated loud and far.

They girt their loins up and they trod  
The path of danger, rough and high;  
For Action, Action was their god,  
"Be up and doing" was their cry.

A thousand years have passed away;  
The sands of life are running low;  
The world is sleeping out her day;  
The day is dying—be it so.

A thousand years have passed amain;  
The sands of life are running thin;  
Thought is our leader—Thought is vain;  
Speech is our goddess—Speech is sin.

## II

It needs no thought to understand,  
No speech to tell, nor sight to see  
That there has come upon our land  
The curse of Inactivity.

We do not see the vital point  
That 'tis the eighth, most deadly, sin  
To wail, "The world is out of joint"—  
And not attempt to put it in.

We see the swollen stream of crime  
    Flow hourly past us, thick and wide;  
We gaze with interest for a time,  
    And pass by on the other side.

We see the tide of human sin  
    Rush roaring past our very door,  
And scarcely one man plunges in  
    To drag the drowning to the shore.

We, dull and dreamy, stand and blink,  
    Forgetting glory, strength and pride,  
Half—listless watchers on the brink,  
    Half—ruined victims of the tide.

### III

We question, answer, make defence,  
    We sneer, we scoff, we criticize,  
We wail and moan our decadence,  
    Enquire, investigate, surmise;

We preach and prattle, peer and pry  
And fit together two and two:  
We ponder, argue, shout, swear, lie—  
We will not, for we cannot, DO.

Pale puny soldiers of the pen,  
Absorbed in this your inky strife,  
Act as of old, when men were men  
England herself and life yet life.

*October 1912*

### XXXIII

#### RAIN

**W**HEN the rain is coming down,  
And all Court is still and bare,  
And the leaves fall wrinkled, brown,  
Through the kindly winter air,  
And in tattered flannels I  
'Sweat' beneath a tearful sky,  
And the sky is dim and grey,  
And the rain is coming down,  
And I wander far away  
From the little red-capped town:  
There is something in the rain  
That would bid me to remain:  
There is something in the wind  
That would whisper, "Leave behind  
All this land of time and rules,  
Land of bells and early schools.

Latin, Greek and College food  
Do you precious little good.  
Leave them: if you would be free  
Follow, follow, after me!"

When I reach 'Four Miler's' height,  
And I look abroad again  
On the skies of dirty white  
And the drifting veil of rain,  
And the bunch of scattered hedge  
Dimly swaying on the edge,  
And the endless stretch of downs  
Clad in green and silver gowns;  
There is something in their dress  
Of bleak barren ugliness,  
That would whisper, "You have read  
Of a land of light and glory:  
But believe not what is said.  
'Tis a kingdom bleak and hoary,  
Where the winds and tempests call  
And the rain sweeps over all.

Heed not what the preachers say  
Of a good land far away.  
Here's a better land and kind  
And it is not far to find."

Therefore, when we rise and sing  
Of a distant land, so fine,  
Where the bells for ever ring,  
And the suns for ever shine:  
Singing loud and singing grand,  
Of a happy far-off land,  
O! I smile to hear the song,  
For I know that they are wrong,  
That the happy land and gay  
Is not very far away,  
And that I can get there soon  
Any rainy afternoon.

And when summer comes again,  
And the downs are dimpling green,  
And the air is free from rain,  
And the clouds no longer seen:

Then I know that they have gone  
To find a new camp further on,  
Where there is no shining sun  
To throw light on what is done,  
Where the summer can't intrude  
On the fort where winter stood:  
—Only blown and drenching grasses,  
Only rain that never passes,  
Moving mists and sweeping wind,  
And I follow them behind!

*October 1912*



## XXXIV

### A TALE OF TWO CAREERS

#### I SUCCESS

**H**E does not dress as other men,  
His 'kish' is loud and gay,  
His 'side' is as the 'side' of ten  
Because his 'barnes' are grey.

His head has swollen to a size  
Beyond the proper size for heads,  
He metaphorically buys  
The ground on which he treads.

Before his face of haughty grace  
The ordinary mortal cowers:  
A 'forty-cap' has put the chap  
Into another world from ours.

The funny little world that lies  
    'Twixt High Street and the Mound  
Is just a swarm of buzzing flies  
    That aimlessly go round:

If one is stronger in the limb  
    Or better able to work hard,  
It's quite amusing to watch him  
    Ascending heavenward.

But if one cannot work or play  
    (Who loves the better part too well),  
It's really sad to see the lad  
    Retained compulsorily in hell.

## II FAILURE

We are the wasters, who have no  
    Hope in this world here, neither fame,  
Because we cannot collar low  
    Nor write a strange dead tongue the same  
As strange dead men did long ago.

We are the weary, who begin  
The race with joy, but early fail,  
Because we do not care to win  
A race that goes not to the frail  
And humble: only the proud come in.

We are the shadow-forms, who pass  
Unheeded hence from work and play.  
We are to-day, but like the grass  
That to-day is, we pass away;  
And no one stops to say 'Alas!'

Though we have little, all we have  
We give our School. And no return  
We can expect for what we gave;  
No joys; only a summons stern,  
"Depart, for others entrance crave!"

As soon as she can clearly prove  
That from us is no hope of gain,  
Because we only bring her love  
And cannot bring her strength or brain,  
She tells us, "Go: it is enough."

She turns us out at seventeen,  
We may not know her any more,  
And all our life with her has been  
A life of seeing others score,  
While we sink lower and are mean.

We have seen others reap success  
Full-measure. None has come to us.  
Our life has been one failure. Yes,  
But does not God prefer it thus?  
God does not also praise success.

And for each failure that we meet,  
    And for each place we drop behind,  
Each toil that holds our aching feet,  
    Each star we seek and never find,  
God, knowing, gives us comfort meet.

The School we care for has not cared  
    To cherish nor keep our names to be  
Memorials. God hath prepared  
    Some better thing for us, for we  
His hopes have known, His failures shared.

*November 1912*

## XXXV

### PEACE

**T**HERE is silence in the evening when the long days cease,  
And a million men are praying for an ultimate release  
From strife and sweat and sorrow—they are praying for  
peace.

But God is marching on.

Peace for a people that is striving to be free!  
Peace for the children of the wild wet sea!  
Peace for the seekers of the promised land—do we  
Want peace when God has none?

We pray for rest and beauty that we know we cannot earn,  
And ever are we asking for a honey-sweet return;  
But God will make it bitter, make it bitter, till we learn  
That with tears the race is run.

And did not Jesus perish to bring to men, not peace,  
But a sword, a sword for battle and a sword that should  
not cease?

Two thousand years have passed us. Do we still want peace  
Where the sword of Christ has shone?

Yes, Christ perished to present us with a sword,  
That strife should be our portion and more strife our reward,  
For toil and tribulation and the glory of the Lord  
And the sword of Christ are one.

If you want to know the beauty of the thing called rest,  
Go, get it from the poets, who will tell you it is best  
(And their words are sweet as honey) to lie flat upon your  
chest

And sleep till life is gone.

I know that there is beauty where the low streams run,  
And the weeping of the willows and the big sunk sun,  
But I know my work is doing and it never shall be done,  
Though I march for ages on.

Wild is the tumult of the long grey street,  
O, is it never silent from the tramping of their feet?  
Here, Jesus, is Thy triumph, and here the world's defeat,  
For from here all peace has gone.

There's a stranger thing than beauty in the ceaseless city's  
breast,  
In the throbbing of its fever—and the wind is in the west,  
And the rain is driving forward where there is no rest,  
For the Lord is marching on.

*December 1912*



## XXXVI

### THE RIVER

**H**E watched the river running black  
Beneath the blacker sky;  
It did not pause upon its track  
Of silent instancey.  
It did not hasten, nor was slack,  
But still went gliding by.  
  
It was so black. There was no wind  
Its patience to defy.  
It was not that the man had sinned,  
Or that he wished to die.  
Only the wide and silent tide  
Went slowly sweeping by.

The mass of blackness moving down  
    Filled full of dreams the eye;  
The lights of all the lighted town  
    Upon its breast did lie.  
The tall black trees were upside down  
    In the river's phantasy.

He had an envy for its black  
    Inscrutability;  
He felt impatiently the lack  
    Of that great law whereby  
The river never travels back  
    But still goes gliding by;

But still goes gliding by, nor clings  
    To passing things that die,  
Nor shows the secrets that it brings  
    From its strange source on high.  
And he felt "We are two living things,  
    And the weaker one is I."

He saw the town, that living stack  
    Piled up against the sky.  
He saw the river running black  
    On, on and on: O, why  
Could he not move along his track  
    With such consistency?

He had a yearning for the strength  
    That comes of unity:  
The union of one soul at length  
    With its twin-soul to lie:  
To be a part of one great strength  
    That moves and cannot die.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*     \*

He watched the river running black  
    Beneath the blacker sky.  
He pulled his coat about his back,  
    He did not strive nor cry.  
He put his foot upon the track  
    That still went gliding by.

The thing that never travels back  
Received him silently.  
And there was left no shred, no wrack  
To show the reason why:  
Only the river running black  
Beneath the blacker sky.

*February 1913*

## XXXVII

### THE SEEKERS

**T**HE gates are open on the road  
That leads to beauty and to God.

Perhaps the gates are not so fair,  
Nor quite so bright as once they were,  
When God Himself on earth did stand  
And gave to Abraham His hand  
And led him to a better land.

For lo! the unclean walk therein,  
And those that have been soiled with sin.  
The publican and harlot pass  
Along: they do not stain its grass.  
In it the needy has his share,  
In it the foolish do not err.  
Yes, spurned and fool and sinner stray  
Along the highway and the way.

And what if all its ways are trod  
By those whom sin brings near to God?  
This journey soon will make them clean:  
Their faith is greater than their sin.  
For still they travel slowly by  
Beneath the promise of the sky,  
Scorned and rejected utterly;  
Unhonoured; things of little worth  
Upon the highroads of this earth;  
Afflicted, destitute and weak:  
Nor find the beauty that they seek,  
The God they set their trust upon:  
—Yet still they march rejoicing on.

*March 1913*

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